

HB 525 intellectual diversity
House Education Committee
February 16, 2007
Rm. 137

For the record, my name is Jennifer Donohue and I am testifying in opposition to HB 525 on behalf of myself as a student at the University of Montana.

As a freshman, I was given an assignment to choose a topic, research it, take a position and write an essay. So, I did my research, took my position and turned in my paper. That very class period, after the papers had been collected, the professor began a lecture on the topic I had written about. He provided both sides of the argument. Then he gave us his assessment of the issue, which happened to be the polar opposite of the position I took in my paper.

Well, I sat there in class, quite upset, sure my grade would suffer. I don't remember much of the details of the paper or even the class, but I remember exactly how I felt. And I felt worse a week later when the papers were set to be handed back. Sure, my grade was poor, I had already decided on my plan of attack: first I would see the professor in his office hours and if need be I would take my grievance to the next level and then the next, until I felt satisfied with the outcome.

However, much to my surprise, when I got my paper back and flipped to the last page, I saw the letter A. We disagreed, but I wrote a good paper and backed it up with solid research, so I was graded fairly.

I have no doubt, now, that had I written a bad paper that agreed with his position, I would likewise have been graded fairly. But, the real point is, had I not been graded fairly I would not have hesitated to utilize the grievance processes on my campus to its full advantage.

So I oppose this bill, on the grounds that it is unnecessary. In the rare instance that the issues raised in this bill actually pose a problem, we have established that the Montana University System already has adequate policies and procedures in place to address them.

But, it is also important to remember what it is we are talking about: education, *higher* education. Earlier we heard a bill about compulsory attendance which is an interesting juxtaposition with higher education. College and University students are much different. We are not children, in need of protection, but intelligent and capable young men and women who have *chosen* to continue our education beyond the years of compulsory attendance, in search of a higher education. We are not compelled by an outside source, we are compelled by our own quest for knowledge. Not only did we choose to continue our learning, but quite frankly we pay a lot for that choice. We are willing to incur the high costs of tuition and more often than not, go in to debt because we feel it is a worth while investment.

So, when we sit in those lecture halls, we are very invested in the quest for intellectual diversity. We are invested with our time and our money. We are not the audience in a professor's performance, but invested actors on the stage of higher learning.

So, when I read line 23 of the bill: "teachers should not take unfair advantage of the immaturity of students by indoctrinating them. . ." I found myself offended at the suggestion that students are blank slates, empty vessels, waiting to be filled, indoctrinated by the first charismatic professor that we hear. Quite to the contrary, we are intelligent men and women, quite capable of critical thinking, and thinking for ourselves. And we are also quite capable of recognizing the rare instance when we have been treated unfairly and then utilizing the tools already in place on our campuses to redress our grievances.

We are students, not by compulsion, but by choice, students in search of higher education. It is that search that I fear will fall in jeopardy under this bill. While, there is no real problem here to address, this proposed solution has the potential to create a real problem. I fear this legislation would be a road block to my search for higher education because of the unintended consequence of professors engaging in self-censorship. If this happens, the value of my investment will drastically depreciate. The value of my education will be cheapened.

So, I oppose this bill, though, I share its quest. The quest for intellectual diversity is shared by me and all my peers, that is what makes us students of higher education. But I firmly believe that legislation is not the means to achieve intellectual diversity. No, the way to achieve intellectual diversity is through the free and open exchange of intellect, the liaise fair market place of ideas. By imposing regulations on the free market of ideas, this legislation will do just the opposite of what it intends, that is it will hinder, not ensure intellectual diversity.

As a student invested in higher education, I ask that you do not pass House Bill 525.